

Can Pentecost Happen Again?

By Promoter of Justice Judy Morris, OP (Louisville, KY)

Ever wonder what happened to civility in the United States? Television programs that focus on current political and social issues involve commentators and guests constantly interrupting each other. No one has the opportunity to finish a sentence. Political dialogue among elected officials has become political diatribe, deteriorating into toxic partisan posturing.

I recently read about a speaker traveling around the country teaching civility. He speaks to audiences accustomed to violent rhetoric from movies, television, and the internet, and even from daily contacts.

What does all of this have to do with justice or peace? Respect is the fertile ground of both. Non-violence begins with respect that enables real listening to happen. I suspect that most of us have experienced having a conversation in which another person is ready to respond or pounce before a sentence is completed.

Many justice issues bring forth strong responses. Life or death issues or quality of life issues touch us deeply.

Perhaps the most divisive current issue is abortion. Camps line up either under the flag of “pro-life” or “pro-choice.” In a recent letter, Don Goergen, OP, clearly shares a challenge:

Unfortunately, in our recent history, certain moral issues have become primarily associated with the politics of the left and others with the politics of the right, which can lead each side into self-righteousness about moral issues that they espouse. We have lost sight of, or perhaps never had, a consistency in our ethical vision that gives witness to the gospel as a whole. That the right to life has become an issue of the right, and the promotion of justice on behalf of the poor an issue of the left is deplorable. Do we as Catholics fall into the same trap whereby our deepest identity is not with the gospel itself but with a particular ideological perspective created by the current reality of American political life?

Is a consistent life ethic possible today? Often I have observed people who claim to be “pro-life” focus on only one issue, abortion. For them, the death penalty, war, gun proliferation do not fall under the category of pro life. At the same time, those who call themselves “pro-choice” fail to see that only one has a choice. In reality this is another violent solution to a problem. A consistent life ethic looks at each social concern through the lens of each person’s dignity, respect for the common good and promoting life.

How do we create a “safe place” where listening can happen, even when the subject is divisive? We need a Pentecost moment where being right is not the goal, but listening with a desire to understand another’s piece of the Truth.

May the Holy Spirit of Pentecost compel us to speak with tongues of civility.